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The Legend of the Trailing Arbutus





THE LEGEND *of the* TRAILING ARBUTUS



M. OLIVE HESS

1914

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The Legend of the Trailing Arbutus

[There is a beautiful legend connected with the dainty trailing arbutus, which runs as follows:


The arbutus, most delicate and fragrant of all our wild flowers, was created as a climbing vine to cover Eve's bower in the Garden of Eden. She tended and watered the lovely plant, and learned to love it above all other flowers in the Garden.

After the fall and banishment of our first parents from Paradise, the arbutus vine became so lonely and missed Eve so greatly that it crept down from its bower and trailed through the Garden and out into the world in search of her who loved it.

It is still seeking her through woods and waste places in a search that never ends, and each springtime sends forth the delicate fragrance of its pink and white blossoms to tell of its faithfulness.]

TO
MRS. KATE [BURKS] LOGAN
IN GRATEFUL ACKNOWLEDGMENT
OF
HER AID AND SYMPATHY DURING SCHOOL DAYS
THIS LITTLE VOLUME
IS
DEDICATED

The Legend of the Trailing Arbutus

NE balmy morn of April, at the early dawn,
Just as the sun peeped o'er the verdant hill,
Awakened by the matin song of birds upon the lawn
And by the distant rippling of the rill,
I wandered forth alone across deep-furrowed fields
And on into the foot-hills of the mountains old,
That rear their rugged peaks aloft as mighty shields
To shelter our sweet valley from the cold.
My thoughts sped on before me to the beauteous spot
Deep in the wildwood, where the clamb'ring vines
Clothed oak and elm in garments green, and wild forget-me-not
And sweet arbutus grew 'neath rustling pines;
Where flowed between its fern-clad banks a rippling stream,
Fresh from a sparkling spring it danced and purled—
There in the violet studded grass I loved to dream,
Forgetful of the sorrows of the world.

[Seven]

THE LEGEND OF THE TRAILING ARBUTUS

Beneath an old pine tree that for long years hath stood
As guardian of this spot I love so well
I rested, drinking in the beauty of the wood,
And reveled in the fairy haunted dell.
Sweet mem'ries of a long-gone past came back to me—
'T was here in childhood's hours I loved to stray,
With one to guide my wand'ring footsteps o'er the lea
Who shared alike my lessons and my play;
'T was she, my gentle sister, whose sweet counsels given,
Tho' oft unheeded, now I pray to own,
For now her angel spirit watches over me from heaven—
Too oft we prize great blessings when they're flown!
For hours I rested there beneath the cooling shade,
So grateful to my aching, fevered brow;
My fancies, interwoven with bright visions, made
Great castles in the air, all shattered now.
Then suddenly, as if awaking from a sleep,
And half amazéd at the sounds I heard,
I started up full conscious from my reverie deep,
And heeded eagerly each whispered word.

[Eight]

THE LEGEND OF THE TRAILING ARBUTUS

Close to the earth I bent my ear,
All curiously, that I might hear
The wondrous story told to me
Beneath the nodding greenwood tree.
'T was not by elves this tale was told,
With merry songs and harps of gold;
Nor did I learn from fairies gay
A theme to grace a minstrel's lay;
Ner yet from notes of warbling bird
Was this strange tale in wonder heard;
Not dancing stream, nor sighing breeze,
Nor insects humming in the trees—
The story was not told by these.

A tiny voice, so low and sweet,
Made clearest music at my feet,
And as I stooped to listen well
That I to others, too, might tell,
A blossom from arbutus vine
Lifted its sweet face to mine,
And told this story, half divine:

[Nine]

THE LEGEND OF THE TRAILING ARBUTUS

When this great world was first created, long ago,
Ere yet were formed the mountains or the deep,
Before thy human parents came to live below,
When first all nature wakened from her sleep,
Our all-wise Father in His love created me
To bear my fragrant incense to His throne,
And said thy lovely Mother should my guardian be,
That she should care for me as for her own.
Ah, how I loved sweet Eve! No mortal love could be
More strong and tender than the love I bore
And cherished for my guardian as she cared for me.
A garland of my flowers she always wore,
And twined them in the braids of her dark, shining hair;
Her loving fingers twined my tendrils green
All 'round the trees and branches in the Garden fair,
And o'er her bower my fragrant bells were seen.

THE LEGEND OF THE TRAILING ARBUTUS

For I was then, indeed, a clamb'ring, tendriled vine,
Not humbly trailing as you see me now.
Dost think it strange that now such lowly form is mine?
Ah, 't was deep sorrow caused me thus to bow!
And now, take heed to my sad story, friend so true—
I know thou art a friend in truth to me
And all my kindred flowers, for oft, when skies were blue,
I've seen thee lie beneath the old pine tree
In meditation deep, and long didst linger there
And watch with brightening smile the violets blue,
Nor dared to mar with touch profane their petals fair,
Nor scatter from their leaves the morning dew;
And once there came with thee to this sweet, lonely spot
Another maiden, fair to look upon
But thoughtless, who our blossoms crushed. Hast thou forgot
Thy promise to behold, but gather none,
If I made known to thee my treasure-house of joy?
How many ruthless hands and thoughtless hearts
Pluck fair and fragrant blossoms, only to destroy,
And care not that their beauty soon departs!

[Eleven]

THE LEGEND OF THE TRAILING ARBUTUS

These words of thine were sweet to me;
I knew that I could tell to thee
The story of my wand'rings drear,
And thou wouldst lend attentive ear.
Ne'er yet has mortal ever heard,
Nor human sympathy been stirred
In pity for my loneliness,
Or care for my unhappiness;
For ne'er before have mortal feet
Refused to crush my blossoms sweet,
Nor mortal hands such kindness shown
As I received from thee alone—
I will repay thee with my own.

In God's fair garden, where I grew
In those first days when earth was new,
All things were fair and knew no ill;
All lived according to His will
Who in His love created all
For happiness, both great and small—
What anguish from such bliss to fall!

THE LEGEND OF THE TRAILING ARBUTUS

Yet, there was one alone in this fair dwelling-place
Who harbored thoughts of evil in his heart—
The serpent, who more subtle was than all our race,
Determined then to fling a poisoned dart
Into the happiness that God's great love had wrought,
And cause death and destruction in the world.
He, filled with wicked wisdom, ever harbored thought
That woman's mind was weaker, and so easier hurled
From love and loyalty, and taught to disobey
The laws which, in His higher wisdom, God had made;
So unto happy Eve came Satan one bright day,
And asked in mockery: Hath God not said,
Of all the trees of Eden thou mayst freely eat,
But of the Tree of Knowledge thou mayst never taste,
For, if thou darest even touch its fruit so sweet,
Thou diest, and this lovely Eden lieth waste?

THE LEGEND OF THE TRAILING ARBUTUS

But I say unto thee, thou shalt not die,
For on the day thou eatest of this tree
All knowledge shall unsealed before thee lie,
And thou shalt even as the Godhead be,
Discerning good and evil all thy days.
Is not this worth one disobedient act of thine,
To henceforth walk in wisdom's pleasant ways?
Come, take and eat, the flavor is divine.
And thus beguiled and tempted by the evil one,
She took the fruit forbidden and did eat;
And then, herself turned tempter, when the deed was done—
For to her taste the stolen fruit was sweet—
She gave to Adam and he, too, forgetting, ate.
At once their eyes were opened and they knew
The all-wise Father's wrath was terrible and great,
And that the words He spake to them were true.

THE LEGEND OF THE TRAILING ARBUTUS

For, on the evening of that day,
Adam and Eve were hid away,
In fear and trembling of the wrath
Of God, who, walking in the garden path,
Came unto them and called their name;
They from their leafy covert came
And humbly bowed in silent shame.

What is this deed that thou hast done,
That thou dost from My presence run
And hide thee from the light of day,
And into deepest shadows stray?
Hast thou forgotten My command,
In disobedience stretched thy hand
And plucked the fruit forbidden thee?
Come now, My children, answer Me.
Then Adam unto God addressed
These cowardly words, and thus confessed:
The serpent tempted Eve, and she
In turn the fruit did offer me—
We both have eaten of the tree.

THE LEGEND OF THE TRAILING ARBUTUS

Alas! My children, for this grievous sin of thine,
From out this happy Eden must you go,
To wander o'er the earth, afar from grace divine,
And thus to all succeeding ages show
That when the word of God is spoken in command,
That word must all creation strict obey,
Or else receive such condemnation from His hand
As He doth in His wrath to you display;
In sorrow and repentance shalt thou till the soil,
And bitterness and pain thy lot shalt be;
Thorns and thistles shall alone reward thy toil,
Until thou turn thy heart again to Me.

THE LEGEND OF THE TRAILING ARBUTUS

Then sadly forth from Eden went the twain,
Whom God had driven out in righteous wrath;
Their punishment henceforth to live in toil and pain,
And face forevermore eternal death.
And as they passed the portals of that happy home,
The gates closed fast, and at their Maker's word
That nevermore to sinless Eden they should come,
He placed an angel there with flaming sword.
Yet, one great promise had the Heavenly Father made,
To comfort, even in their punishment—
This was the promise: Thou shalt bruise the serpent's head—
Which gave them hope thro' all their banishment
That God would grant them final victory over sin;
In His good time, thro' one great Sacrifice,
They should, thro' faith in His dear Son, redemption win,
And enter into His own Paradise.

THE LEGEND OF THE TRAILING ARBUTUS

And after this, when no one came to rest within my bower,
Nor gather from their stems my fragrant bloom,
Nor pour upon my roots the pure, refreshing shower,
My life seemed wasting, and the silent doom
Of utter loneliness and grief came over me;
And then, when my despair was greatest, came a thought,
An inspiration from above it seemed to be—
Forth will I go throughout the world, and naught
Shall stay me till I find her whom in love I seek!
Then, flinging out my tendrils to the morning breeze,
Altho' at first I faltered, for my strength was weak,
I wound my way in sadness through the trees.

THE LEGEND OF THE TRAILING ARBUTUS

At last I came unto the gate,
And there the angel bade me wait;
It is the Father's will, said he,
That none should pass, not even thee.
I meekly bowed at his behest,
Yet still I did not cease my quest;
All silently I sought the ground,
And stealthily my way I wound
From out the garden into space
To seek my loved attendant's face.
Ah, no, I could not, dared not wait,
I knew not what might be her fate—
And so I crept beneath the gate!
Under the withered leaves and sere,
I wandered on through forest drear;
My path was oft beset with snares,
Where nothing grew but weeds and tares;
Again, thro' green, secluded glade,
Where sunlight filtered thro' the shade;
On, on, throughout the world I've crept,
For age on age this quest I've kept,
Nor day nor night have ever slept.

[*Nineteen*]

THE LEGEND OF THE TRAILING ARBUTUS

Once, while upon my endless journey thro' the land,
I came unto a hillside, bleak and bare,
And saw three crosses on its rocky summit stand,
And heard great shouts from people gathered there.
Behold the Saviour of the world! they cry aloud;
While mockingly their jeers they still pursue,
In love divine He looks with pity on the crowd—
Father, forgive; they know not what they do!
Those words of love from Him who hung upon the cross
Came unto me as peace for weary years
Of lonely wandering and sadness for my loss,
And looking up in gladness thro' my tears,
I gazed upon a face, so beautiful and fair,
Which seemed to hold within its compass all
Of heav'n and earth, of bitter anguish and despair,
And tasting all the wormwood and the gall,
And bearing all the sadness and the weary pain
Of Him who suffered there, yet deigned to bless
Those who reviled and mocked Him, and to turn again
Upon their wrath His words of tenderness.

THE LEGEND OF THE TRAILING ARBUTUS

Ah! 't is the mother of our Lord who stands apart,
And looks with tender sadness on her Son—
How deeply has the sword of sorrow pierced her heart,
While gazing thus upon the dying One!
Lo! now the sun is darkened, and the Saviour cries:
My work is finished! Bowing down His head,
And casting one last glance upon His mother, dies;
So are the hopes of all His followers dead!
Yet still I linger, while the soldiers pierce His side,
And lift Him from the cross upon the ground;
They bear His body to the tomb at eventide,
In spices and in linen garments wound.
And as the little concourse winds its tearful way
Unto the grave within the garden fair,
I also follow on to where His loved ones lay
His precious body down, and leave Him there.

THE LEGEND OF THE TRAILING ARBUTUS

So while the Saviour gently slept,
Unto His resting place I crept,
And there, beside the fast-closed door,
Where unseen angels hovered o'er,
I saw again that sad, sweet face,
So like the mother of your race—
Oh, mother love! With grief intense
Awaiting her great recompense;
For now the night comes on apace
And she must leave the sacred place,
Yet, at the first faint streak of gray
That ushers in the Sabbath day,
Unto the tomb she wends her way.

And when she comes, with what surprise
There flashes on her wondering eyes
That vision of the heavenly light,
Arrayed in robes of dazzling white;
Ah! how the open, empty tomb
Drives from her heart all fear and gloom;
Ah! with what joy falls on her ear
The angel's words of peace and cheer—
The Lord is risen, He is not here!

THE LEGEND OF THE TRAILING ARBUTUS

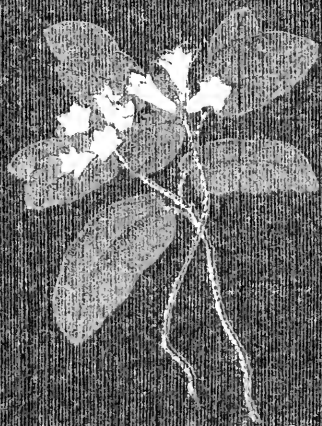
That Easter day there came to me a happy thought,
Which more and more I feel is true and good:
Since God thro' woman has to earth salvation brought,
And purchased man's redemption with His blood;
Since all who come to Him shall endless life receive,
It seems to me that now my quest is done.
'T is true, I have not yet again beheld sweet Eve,
But I have seen Another, who has won
The vict'ry over sin and bruised the serpent's head,
Who conquered death and took away its sting;
Before Him all the vanquished hosts of darkness fled
When He to man did free salvation bring.
Yet still throughout the world I wander on apace,
Shedding my fragrance o'er the hearts of those
Who love my dainty blossoms, and my hiding place
To those in grief I evermore disclose.

* * * * *

With great surprise I found I'd listened for an hour,
But now, at length, the gentle voice was still;
I stooped and kissed the tiny, fragrant flower,
Then homeward turned my footsteps o'er the hill.

[Twenty-Three]

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